

Report Date Range:	September 30, 2015-March 31, 2016
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Recipient Organization Name:	North Cal-Neva Resource Conservation and Development
Project Title as Stated on Grant Agreement:	Surprise Valley Grown Food Hub Study Team
Grant Agreement Number:	15-LFPP-CA-0081
Year Grant was Awarded:	2015
Project City/State:	Alturas, CA
Total Awarded Budget:	17,983

LFPP staff may contact you to follow up for long-term success stories. Who may we contact?

☐ Same Authorized Representative listed above (check if applicable).

X Different individual: Name: Laurie Wayne / Hannah Curcio; Email:

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1. Goals and objectives of the project:

Establish a hub study group to create a producer's agreement with a baseline of practices, requirements, and a set of rules for how producers work together.

Progress Made: complete. A job description for the planning team was written and distributed throughout Surprise Valley, and both display and classified ads were placed in regional newspapers. We also created the SurpriseValleyGrown.com website and advertised for interested producers through this page: <http://svg.lxw.com/index.php/were-hiring/>. The project coordinators ranked applicants using a scoring matrix that identified work style (initiative, proactivity, thoroughness), communication (giving and receiving feedback, collaboration, balance, open mindedness), drive (creativity, vision) and knowledge, skills and abilities (experience, ability to use technology). Coordinators also noted any unique perspective, special skills, other contributions a candidate could make to the team. At the end of the evaluation process, six candidates were chosen to join the team.

Impact on Community: Eight part-time jobs (six producer/team members, two facilitators) were created during the winter months when farming is typically on hiatus.

Research food hub models and implementation strategies through a variety of methods, including webinars, printed references, report-backs at future meetings, visits, and case studies.

Progress Made: complete. In six meetings comprising about 20 hours over 3 months, the team educated itself about the issues and opportunities presented by the creation of a food hub. The planning team started with general food hub research, largely through the National Good Food Network's community of practice and the USDA's website, then broke up into sub-teams to perform interviews, site visits, and individual focused research in particular aspects of hub operations and organization. Sub-teams reported back to the larger team, and an online library of documentation, links, and meeting notes was created using Google Drive.

Impact on Community: community members were made aware of the Food Hub project as a part of conversations coming from the interviewing and community assessment activities undertaken by them team.

Present an overview of information obtained about food hubs, including recommendations on what the group feels would work best in Surprise Valley.

Progress Made: complete. A Community Meeting and potluck was held in March. Press releases, direct mail, and social media helped us to spread the word, and the largest meeting venue in our Valley was filled to overflowing on the night of the meeting. The team and partners like the Superintendent of the School District combined forces to explain the findings of the planning team. To keep the presentation interactive, we employed the use of audience response "clickers" that were secured by our local farm advisor. The presentation, including results of the audience response, is available at <http://svg.lxw.com/SurpriseValleyGrownCommunityPresentation.pdf> .

Impact on Community: About 10% of the people in our valley attended the community meeting, and an article in the local newspaper informed even more people about the planning team's activities. As a result, the community was better informed and energized about the possibilities of strengthening the local food system.

Create a report based on their findings and community input recommending more study, hub implementation, or other next steps.

Progress Made: complete. The report is a compilation of the team's findings and recommendations, and is a more-detailed version of the presentation above. A key part of the report is an explanation of the "go-forward matrix" which the team put together, addressing 16 key aspects of Food Hub planning, and providing short- and long-term

recommendations for moving forward with the Hub, as well as a listing of options the team considered. The matrix is available at <https://goo.gl/1FyDge> .

Impact on Community: as a static document, the report, which is available to the community, is documentation of a “moment in time” that will quickly turn into an historical snapshot of where the planning team thought the hub project would go. This report informs readers, but will not likely change behaviors or create quantifiable change.

2. Overall impact of the project on the intended beneficiaries

Number of direct jobs created: 8 short-term (winter) jobs for planning team

- a. Number of jobs retained: N/A
- b. Number of indirect jobs created: N/A
- c. Number of markets expanded: N/A
- d. Number of new markets established: N/A
- e. Market sales increased by \$N/A and increased by N/A%.
- f. Number of farmers/producers that have benefited from the project: ten of the eleven producers (91%) contacted have indicated that they would like to participate in a pilot.
 - i. Percent Increase: N/A
 - ii.

3. Did you expand your customer base by reaching new populations such as new ethnic groups, additional low income/low access populations, new businesses, etc.? If so, how?
- In selection of the planning team, we attempted to get representation from different cultural and socioeconomic communities in our valley, and as the team worked, it reached out to hispanic, tribal, and economically-disadvantaged community members, attempting to contact youth and elders. Our success in this area was uneven (please see section 9, “Lessons Learned”).

b. Community Partnerships:

Partner	Contribution to Results	Continuing Contribution
Surprise Valley Joint Unified School District	Provided matching funds and worked closely to ensure that the district would become the Food Hub’s first (pilot) customer.	The District has committed to being a customer for any pilot or other Food Hub activities. The Community Liaison role will continue to work closely with local food producers to integrate nutrition and community engagement as a regular part of District operations.

Surprise Valley Saturday Market/Modoc Harvest (SVSM/MH)	Surprise Valley Saturday Market was able to share its list of vendors/producers with the hub. This aided the hub in connecting for interviews/feedback as the hub planning team conducted a community readiness assessment.	SVSM/MH has committed on-going support to the Hub to assure its sustainability. A commitment of the SVSM/MH is to this year, include the hub in its five-year strategic business plan.
North State Grocery	NSG's produce manager expressed strong interest in carrying SVG products locally in Alturas' Holiday Market. He also provided the team with information about strategic project planning (starting with a few products that the hub would be able to provide consistently), pricing, and packaging guidance.	North State Grocery (owner of Holiday Market, the largest grocery store in Modoc County, and also operates a chain of stores throughout the region) has committed to provide the hub with consultation guidance from their regional produce manager to support Surprise Valley Grown in becoming a supplier for Holiday Market and possibly regionally, in the future. The regional produce manager has expertise in food hub development.
Regional/Northern California Food Hubs (North Valley	Via conference call, provided monthly access to established hubs with expertise in operational issues and infrastructure.	This group continues to be an on-going resource to the hub and can offer support for troubleshooting issues as they arise.
Natural Resource Conservation Service	NRCS provided support to the hub's efforts by publicizing the hub's final community presentation. NRCS printed postcard invitations and paid postage so that it was possible to send every community member of Surprise Valley an invitation to the event. This is part of the reason the turnout to the presentation was so successful.	Moving forward, NRCS has committed to provide the hub producers with technical support for resource utilization, livestock or wildlife management, or soil fertility, and apprise hub producers of financial supports and programs available to producers through NRCS.
Modoc County Environmental Health	Through the hub planning team process, MCEH reviewed hub	MCEH has committed to provide regulatory feedback, producer

(Warren Farnham)	planning guidelines and provided regulatory feedback.	outreach and food safety training to producers of the hub.
University of California, Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources (Farm Advisor, Laura Snell)	UCANR provided the hub with access to “clickers” for the community presentation, as a way of polling community feedback regarding the hub planning team’s processes, and the community’s aspirations for the hub.	On an on-going basis, UCANR has committed to provide support to hub producers in the form of consultation in the following areas: production planning, pest management, and land stewardship.

5. Are you using contractors to conduct the work? If so, how did their work contribute to the results of the LFPP project?

The project coordinators and planning team were all hired as contractors. Program administration and fiscal oversight was provided by the RC&D’s only employee. Since the project was quite short-term and not meant to be an ongoing program, it was determined that this arrangement would make the most sense.

6. Have you publicized any results yet?

The process as well as results were well-publicized in our area. Newspaper articles, letters to the editor team recruiting flyers, and other publicity are emailed with this report. A copy of the community presentation with community feedback can be found at www.surprisevalleygrown.com and the Community Report is also available on the website. Over eighty people attended the Community Dinner where the team’s results (plans) were presented. As the Hub team goes forward with its pilot program, it will continue to reach out to the community and to regional partners.

7. Have you collected any feedback from your community and additional stakeholders about your work? Yes.

If so, how did you collect the information?

Community feedback was obtained at our community presentation via “clickers” (Turning Technologies audience response system) that were used to poll the audience. Attendees were also encouraged to engage hub planning team members in discussion following the presentation, and via the SurpriseValleyGrown.com website.

What feedback was relayed (specific comments)?

The following community-member feedback was collected via electronic audience response during the community presentation in response to polling questions:

1. Why did you choose to attend the community presentation: 26% safe, reliable food; 0% kids eat better, 5% know my producer; 26% economic development; 26% curious/love potlucks; and 16% had another reason for attending.
2. Can local food help can help our community: 88% I think so; and 12% it seems possible, with 0 responses for the options “not sure,” “I don’t think so,” and “No, local food is just food.”
3. How do you currently get local food: 16% I produce it myself; 0% people give it to me; 5% I buy it from my neighbors; 5% at the market when I can afford it; 5% I buy it whenever I see it; 68% a combination of the above responses; and 0% said that they don’t eat local food.
4. What can be foreseen as the biggest challenges for the Surprise Valley food hub: 25% customers not knowing what is available; 0% not knowing what is wanted by customers; 15% limited supply of local food; 25% safety/legality/regulation of selling local food; 5% the affordability of local food; 15% transportation of local food; 10% being able to sell food at a price that is fair to producers; and 5% expressed other challenges.
5. What services offered by the potential hub are most important: 41% marketing; 9% delivery; 23% safety; and 27% quality.
6. Where should the hub expand after the school pilot: 6% restaurants; 39% grocery stores; 22% hospital; 0% neighboring school districts; 28% multi-farm CSA and 6% other.

Responses collected from the Surprise Valley Grown website have all expressed excitement. One example following the community presentation states, “The meeting on 3/3 was great--amazing, energetic people and great home-grown food. As I listened to the team members speak I really wished I could have been a part of all that startup research. Hopefully if there's an opportunity over here in Alturas in the future, I can be a part of it. In the meantime, I'm really interested in keeping up with your project's progress. Good luck with it!”

8. Budget Summary:

As part of the LFPP closeout procedures, you are required to submit the SF-425 (Final Federal Financial Report). Check here if you have completed the SF-425 and are submitting it with this report: X
Did the project generate any income? No

9. Lessons Learned:

As a small planning team, we found that we underestimated the time and work involved in completing our project. As a passionate and committed planning team, we were able to successfully achieve project goals, but the level of effort involved (resulting in many

unpaid hours for some team members) would not be sustainable in a longer project.

Some of the things the team would do differently:

- Use a better system for holding team members accountable for deliverables, and provide for the time required to report hours and expenditures. We did not use up our entire project budget, largely because of the lack of a smooth reporting and administration system.
- Recruit and engage more diverse stakeholders, reaching beyond the producer community. Allocate more time to recruiting in underserved communities and among elders.
- Create and maintain a system for continuing communication such as a newsletter. We used our web site for posting information, but a “push” mechanism would have been more effective. We also could have done a better job with social media - again, this was a staffing issue: we just didn’t allocate time in the project for someone to do this work, and in many cases, especially at the beginning of the project, the planning team really had no idea where things would go - it was entirely possible that the team could have decided that a hub was not feasible.
- Spend time during the proposal process really looking at the budget and anticipating work and expenses (such as insurance and project administration) that support the main efforts of the project.
- We found that some in-kind professional services were not delivered in a satisfactory way, but we did not have much recourse since the services were considered “pro bono” by the person delivering services. The facilitators did their best to treat the services as if they were being paid for, since they were a project match. This conflict could have been avoided through a much more specific set of expectations.
- Our plan was to pilot the hub process during the project so that the team would have time for process and manual revision as needed. Since producers weren’t ready to pilot (there is not much to offer in February), the team did not have that opportunity before the end of the project.

The team was somewhat surprised by the very warm and enthusiastic reception from the community, which provided an indication of the potential of future projects, especially if they are funded and staffed appropriately. Despite our challenges, many aspects of the project went wonderfully, including:

- We used Google tools such as Drive and Groups to communicate and collaborate. Having a cloud-based solution for working together was critical for our geographically-dispersed team.
- This project could not have happened in any other time of year, as producers and anyone involved in food production is very busy. This was an excellent use of winter “downtime” to remain productive.
- The audience response system during the Community Meeting was a bit of a last-minute addition to the presentation, but it really worked well. These tools are available from many Extension and other educational staff, and could even be used more extensively in focus or other groups in the future.

- We had a high level of community support. We were not sure going into the project how well we would be able to capture the energy and imagination of diverse members of the community, but we were delighted to find that, once people were educated about the hub concept, they were supportive in both words and actions.
- This project gave us a chance to reach out to other hubs in our region, and we were able to learn a lot from them, as most of them are one to three years ahead of us. We found that, while there were no hubs working at our tiny scale, the solutions to many of the problems that other hubs had solved (for example, affordable distributed storage) could be integrated into our plan.

ii. If goals or outcome measures were not achieved, identify and share the lessons learned to help others expedite problem-solving: N/A

iii. Describe any lessons learned in the administration of the project that might be helpful for others who would want to implement a similar project:

- As mentioned above, we would certainly recommend being very careful and detailed in describing responsibilities among team members, contractors, and in-kind agreements better. In general, simplifying payment for deliverables and work would allow for more time focusing on achieving the project objectives.
- We would allocate more time for reporting, evaluation, and communication - there was a lot of work done by the planning team, and much information to organize for presentation.

10. Future Work:

As a direct result of the grant funding and goals met during this performance period, the Surprise Valley Grown Food Hub will be in operation during the spring and summer months as a proof of concept. This small-scale project will be a learning process for the food hub's operations team as processes are developed for the full range of services offered from the hub--- how to connect producers with customers, and in what capacity is the hub's involvement is needed to facilitate quality control, marketing, and delivery. This proof of concept program is also a data collection opportunity to determine with current product supply the level of revenue the hub is capable of generating (by means of a service or delivery fee). Hub operations will be run by a volunteer staff until a consistent revenue (supported by data collected during the pilot program) warrant a funded part-time position. The Hub will be overseen by Modoc Harvest, a Local Food Advocacy organization that supports projects that enhance local food access and education.

Do you have any recommendations for future activities and, if applicable, an outline of next steps or additional research that might advance the project goals?

We plan on putting the conclusions of our research and assessment to the test, and building on the knowledge and relationships built during this planning project to set ourselves up for success as we test our assumptions and adapt processes. There are four specific areas of focus we think will be part of the next phase of our food hub's evolution. These will form the basis of activities going forward and will supply the framework for other grant, funding, and partnership proposals.

Focus Area 1: Strengthen the Supply Chain.

Support producer training, assistance, and business development by leveraging projects and activities from the University of California Cooperative Extension, The Natural Resources Conservation Service, The Jefferson Center for Holistic Management, and The Ecological Farmers and Ranchers Alliance; act in partnership with the Community Liaison role in the Surprise Valley Joint Unified School District.

Focus Area 2: Enable safe, reliable distribution.

Acquire and retrofit a utility trailer to be used as a freezer/refrigerator unit for storage, deliveries and food-safe transportation to and from USDA meat processing facilities and other regional hubs and markets.

Focus Area 3: Acquire software to support food hub operations and decision support.

Make buying and selling through the hub easy, secure, and efficient through identifying dedicated staff and professional hub software to help manage all aspects of the hub's operations, logistics, marketing, and ongoing evaluation.

Focus Area 4: Define a prosperous path for the future.

Develop a five-year business plan with the guidance and support of Modoc Harvest, a local nonprofit that provides strategic, administrative, and policy support and advocacy for local food education and access. The business plan will use data gathered from the pilot and build on relationships with other hubs and regional initiatives to identify strategies for sustainability of the local food system.